



VOICE OF AMERICA

Office of Programs

June 9, 1988

DARI SERVICE

PROGRAM REVIEW NOTES

Program Review - May 10

Follow-up - June 16 - 3:30 P.M.

SUMMARY

Due to the existing conditions in Afghanistan, VOA Dari is "not a typical VOA language service," according to Service Chief Bram Hirsch. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and jamming of VOA Dari broadcasts requires additional emphasis on Afghanistan area news and information as well as repeat broadcasts. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops now under way, the Service is considering a variety of scenarios affecting future programming. As normalization occurs, the Service will increase global news coverage and expand use of Americana material. During the follow-up period, the Service will work on improving presentation and take strides to develop a "morning sound" for its daytime broadcasts.

OVERVIEW

The Dari Service is on the air three times daily for a total of two hours. A half-hour early-morning broadcast airs on medium wave at 0030 (5 A.M. in the target area, 8:30 P.M. EDT), and a 45-minute shortwave Breakfast Show follows at 0215 GMT (6:45 A.M. in the target area, 10:15 P.M. EDT). In the evening, the Service broadcasts a 45-minute airshow at 1515 GMT (7:45 P.M. in the target area, 11:15 A.M. EDT). According to the most recent staffing pattern, the Service's 19 positions are fully staffed.

Dari is the language of Afghanistan's urban and rural "settled" population. Since Dari is the *lingua franca* of most of Afghanistan, specialists estimate that VOA Dari has a potential audience of 20,000,000. 12,000,000 Dari speakers live in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Others are located in the Gulf States, Turkey, Western Europe and Canada. Tajiks in the USSR also understand Dari.

Dr. Hirsch reported that the pace of military events quickened in the past several months. There has been no abatement in the fighting. While the Service has begun to anticipate the effects of the Soviet withdrawal, it has intensified "giving the audience what it wants" - news and information pertaining to the target area.

In looking to normalization in Afghanistan, Dr. Hirsch said the Service anticipates that political maneuvering and fighting will continue for some time; jamming will end; outsiders will have better access to Afghanistan including greater freedom to send and receive mail, and the ability to directly assess audience interests. The Service will gradually adapt its programming as normalization takes place. Features programming would be expanded. Within the Service, Americana and literary "units" would be established. If possible, programming might be consolidated into two one-hour units in the event jamming ceases. The evening broadcast would remain the Service's "flagship." The first morning show would be targeted to the rural audience while the second Breakfast Show would be geared to urban listeners on their way to work.

Research and audience relations. VOA Research Chief Kim Elliott reported that Radio Free Afghanistan (RFA) and the BBC are jointly sponsoring a survey in the refugee camps in Peshawar. 400 Dari-speakers and 400 Pushtuns will be interviewed. VOA will buy this survey if the preliminary information looks worthwhile.

The Service has received 597 letters through the first four months of 1988. This compares with a mail count of 660 for all of 1987. The largest number of letters come from the Gulf States and Pakistan. No audience mail is received directly from Afghanistan. The Service presented bar graphs reflecting a geographical breakdown of listeners' letters and a five-year comparison of mail counts.

Competition. Other international broadcasters with programs in Dari include RFA, Deutsche Welle, Radio Pakistan, All India Radio, Radio Moscow, Radio Dushanbe, Radio Zabul (Iran) and the Far East Broadcasting Company.

Reception. VOA Dari shortwave broadcasts are constantly jammed. Frank Mirza of Broadcast Operations presented a cable received from the Islamabad technical monitor on the morning of the review. Jamming of the Dari broadcasts continues.

PROGRAMMING IMPACT

The vast majority of Afghans depend on radio because they are illiterate and access to information about the outside world is difficult. Now more than ever, Afghans are distrustful of news provided by their own government. This has created an acute need for international broadcasts which focus on news and related material on the war and Afghan culture. This need is shared by Afghans living elsewhere as their access to information about Afghanistan also is limited. The Dari Service's ever-increasing volume of listener mail testifies to the value of VOA Dari broadcasts. Refugees interviewed in Peshawar have told of the popularity of these programs. Similar feedback has come from other sources.

Recently, the Soviet media and the Kabul regime have highlighted VOA and other Western broadcasts to Afghanistan as objectionable. More recently, two Dari newspapers in Kabul quoted or summarized news reports broadcast by VOA Dari.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The program review panel made the following recommendations. Action on these recommendations will be discussed at the Dari Service follow-up session, Thursday, June 16, at 3:30 P.M., in the Dari Service offices (1466).

The Dari Service will:

1. Sustain day-to-day coordination with VOA Pashto and other Division services. This coordination will include:
 - Sharing of information from an expected 1988 BBC-RFA survey in the Peshawar camps;
 - Consulting with other Division services concerning a schedule realignment which might permit Dari and Pashto to mount two hour-long broadcasts daily; one in the morning and one in the evening;
 - Agreement by the Dari and Pashto service chiefs to attend each other's program reviews and follow-ups in the future.

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2. Attempt to make full use of anticipated on-scene coverage by correspondent John Schulz in Afghanistan, and eventually develop stringer or staff coverage of its own.
3. As conditions permit, expand coverage of world news and use of international events in both newscasts and news-related programming.
4. Continue to develop plans for brightening the morning broadcasts.
5. Specify the contents of the Magazine segment in radio log entries.
6. Share information gleaned from listener mail with the Office of External Affairs.
7. Sustain the practice of combining updated news items with context from previous stories. The Newsroom should be consulted when stories are combined.
8. In production and music:
 - Ensure consistent presentation in newscasts;
 - Develop a "morning sound;"
 - Concentrate on increasing the warmth and conversation tone in delivery;
 - Carefully screen Service and Division-originated interviews/reports for audio quality, especially in light of jamming;
 - Look for ways to attempt innovative production without sacrificing basic production skills;
 - Continue development of a new collection of bridges.

The News Division will:

9. At the earliest opportunity, seek a visa for Islamabad correspondent John Schulz to report from Afghanistan.

The Current Affairs Division will:

10. Alert services to the forthcoming release of a three-part Focus series on Afghanistan by Richard Evans on the scene in Afghanistan.

External Affairs will:

11. Consult with the BBC and Radio Liberty about the possibility of obtaining results of the 1988 survey of listeners planned for Pakistan later this year.

Broadcast Operations will:

12. Make a new request of the Islamabad technical monitor to record twice-monthly airchecks of Radio Kabul, and to record VOA Dari and Pashto at least once each calendar quarter.

The Frequency Division will:

13. Inform the Office of Programs immediately if there is a change in the pattern or frequency of Soviet jamming of VOA Dari or Pashto.
14. Work with the Programs Office, the North Africa Near East South Asia Division and the Afghan services to formulate a new broadcast schedule for south and central Asian languages.

CONTENT

News and news-related material. News Division editor Rachel Bail suggested that the Service increase the use of world news stories beyond those of direct interest to the target area. Barbara Callihan of the Programs Office commended the Service for its news handling. She reminded the Service to watch for updated news stories. Dr. Hirsch explained that the Service will sometimes use an earlier CN item because the updated story lacks the context required for the audience. He also praised the Newsroom for its support. If circumstances allow NEB Islamabad correspondent to visit Afghanistan, the Service would have him look for unspoken indicators or "human echoes" of the situation. Dr. Hirsch recommended that Mr. Schulz get outside of Kabul to gather firsthand reaction to the withdrawal and to gauge the strength of the military regime.

Current Affairs. Division Chief Ed Warner reported that stringer Richard Evans was traveling in Pakistan and hoped to go inside Afghanistan. Mr. Evans will prepare a three-part Focus on Afghanistan. Dr. Hirsch commended that working relationship between the Service and Current Affairs. Ms. Callihan suggested that the Service look for ways to increase its use of Americana.

Editorials. Bill Stetson of the Policy Office reported good cooperation with the Service. He noted that the Service often calls to clarify language. The Policy Office appreciates "the good close look" that the Service takes toward the editorials. Dr. Hirsch commended the Policy Office for providing the house with very worthwhile editorials and for recognizing the expertise in the Service.

PRESENTATION AND SOUND

Production. Ed Gursky of the Programs Office commended the Service for its information-packed weekend programs. He encouraged the Service to attempt more adventurous forms of production. Mr. Gursky suggested that the Service increase the warmth and energy in its presentation without being frivolous. As an example, he cited the *Agriculture Show* of April 25. Other production suggestions are listed in Recommendation 8.

Music. Music Director Judith Massa was delighted with the Service's new collection of Afghan bridges. She added that the Service does a nice job of making a thoughtful tie between American and Afghan music.

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The Service is fully-staffed with 19 positions. Three candidates are on the register of eligibles in the event that vacancies occur.

WORTHY OF SHARING

- One Dari Service staff member is assigned to handle audience mail including the preparation of the Listeners' Letters program.
- Copies of Dari programs are recorded on cassettes for distribution in refugee camps in Pakistan. This project has increased the awareness of VOA Dari broadcasts and has increased the volume of audience mail.

cc: VOA - Mr. Carlson VOA - Amb. Barry VOA - Mr. Smith
VOA - Mr. Henry VOA - Ms. Morris VOA - Ms. Binda
VOA/B - Mr. Davis VOA/E - Dr. Frese VOA/G - Mr. Munson
VOA/P - Ms. Brambilla VOA/P - Ms. Fox VOA/X - Mr. Coonrod
VOA/X - Dr. Elliott VOA/BB - Mr. Ireland VOA/BB - Mr. Mirza
VOA/EOF - Mr. Goodwin P/R - Mr. Demitz

Clearances:

VOA/B - Mr. Heil

VOA/BB - Mr. DeFontaine

